

The former archbishop's seminary on Milan's Corso Venezia has been revamped by the Ferragamo family-owned Lungarno Collection company to house the Portrait Milano hospitality and retail destination.



Portrait Milano Frames the City's History, Characters and Flair for Chic

The retail and hospitality project spearheaded by the Ferragamo family opened this week after a lengthy renovation. BY MARTINO CARRERA

The Ferragamo family is bringing its hospitality project out of Florence and Rome to Milan, under the moniker Portrait Milano.

Nestled between Corso Venezia and neighboring Via Sant'Andrea, in the Golden Triangle luxury shopping district, and hidden behind a richly decorated 17th century gate that bears the Latin word "humilitas" – as in the Borromeo family's crest – the stately, 30,140-square-foot building is the size of Piazza San Babila and has a layered history of more than 500 years that embeds a great deal of the city's past.

After a few years of behind-the-scenes work, and lengthy negotiations with Milan's municipality, the local curia and the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, the hidden landmark, whose was first constructed in 1564, is becoming a hot-ticket hospitality and retail destination.

In 2013, Leonardo Ferragamo and Valeriano Antonioli, president and chief executive officer, respectively, of the Ferragamo's hospitality business, Lungarno Collection, were scouting Milan for the right location to bring their Portrait formula from Rome and Florence to Italy's fashion capital.

"I felt like a kid unwrapping presents on Christmas," says Antonioli about first visiting the site. The doorman had said the estate was not up for sale or rent, making it an unlikely fit for the hospitality and retail project – until things changed.

The Ferragamos teased the project in 2018 but were mum about details until renovation neared completion in October – when the fashion crowd got a glimpse of it since the Ferragamo luxury brand's show was held in the square – and the building required only a few final touches before opening in late November.

A former archbishop's seminary until 2002, but also through the centuries a library, prison and hospital, in the '80s it housed the workshop of famed architect Mario Bellini, who met Apple's Steve Jobs at the landmark in 1981



A render of the bar at the Portrait Milano hotel.

to discuss product design.

All that and more resonate in the revamp spearheaded by architect Michele De Lucchi. He resurrected the building's historical beauty by exalting the different layers added over the centuries, from the 16th-century colonnade to the Baroque-era portal conceived by architect Francesco Maria Richini and the external facades, whose renovation in the 1967 were managed by Piero Portaluppi.

"It's an ambitious and complex project which we have been working on for several years. I'm extremely proud to be given a chance to add a new important chapter of this 500-year history," says Leonardo Ferragamo. "It's about giving it back to the city of Milan...with the goal and

ambition to turn it into an open place, so that everybody, citizens and anyone who loves the city, can enjoy it."

The space combines retail and a hotel, a luxury spa and an open-air square and passageway poised for a selfie op, and reconfiguring the district's topography.

"Whenever I sketched this place, I'd always draw groups of people crossing the square to enjoy contemporary life in an ancient place," De Lucchi says. "It will connect the entire [luxury] fashion shopping district with a new square," the architect adds.

Antonioli explains that the name Portrait refers to the "ambition to deliver and interpret depictions of the cities where we are based together with the portraits of the Italian and international clients enjoying the space," as

the project sits at the crossroads of culture, hospitality, fashion, art and experiences.

The luxury Portrait Milano hotel is Lungarno Collection's crown jewel. The three-story hotel will have 73 rooms, including 20 suites. On the first floor, each room opens up on the colonnaded passageway, where the hotel will install private outdoor living spaces.

Revamped by the hospitality group's go-to architect Michele Bonan, the hotel's interior is inspired by midcentury design, a Millennial favorite, with wainscoting, light-colored walnut wood, rattan panels, larch wood flooring, as well as nods to Italian know-how and style, with leather handles and the color palette of greens and reds often seen in Milan apartments.

"Designing a hotel is much like filming a movie. First you need to digest the sense of the project, come up with a script and work hard on every detail," says Bonan. "The first time I entered the space I was emotional due to the energy and peacefulness of this place, I could already see this empty landmark animated by visitors."

The north wing will have connecting rooms for families and business people traveling together, while casual and fine-dining restaurants will be installed on the ground floor. Executive chef Alberto Quadrio, an alum of the late restaurateur Gualtiero Marchesi, is poised to offer his take on Italy's culinary tradition, conviviality and togetherness.

The Ferragamos are clearly looking to tap into the wealthy visitors who have been flocking to the city since last spring in a post-pandemic travel rush, be they Americans or Middle Easterners.

The project plans to offer tailored programs for them to enjoy the city, blending in with Milan's tourism strategy geared at attracting high-spending visitors and surpassing the current 2.15-day average time of tourists' stays.

To be sure, Milan's having a second renaissance.

After the Expo-enhanced jolt in 2015, the 2026 Winter Olympic Games are boosting the city's appeal, and many hospitality groups took note, from Casa Cipriani, which opened its members' club earlier this fall, to V Maison and Vico Milano, luxury boutique hotels that both bowed in the past 12 months, as well as the renovated Park Hyatt.

Portrait Milano will employ around 300 people trained via the in-house, three-year training program.

As for retail and entertainment, Portrait Milano is abuzz. Taking over the courtyard's entire west wing, Milan retail maven Antonia Giacinti is opening Antonia's second outpost in the city with around 8,000 square feet of retail space.

The concept store is set to carry a mix of established designers and new names for men and women, as well as offering five branded, rotating concept shops and a dedicated sneaker space.

Giacinti describes it as a source of inspiration for the fashion community. "It's poised to become the quadrilateral of talents, discovery and emotions. It's a place where we aim to nurture new ideas and projects, where even established [fashion] brands can express



Inside a hotel room of Portrait Milano.

nuances they usually are unable to via their flagships."

"Although everybody else is decamping elsewhere, outside Italy, we've always been in the city, Milan is our elsewhere," she says.

And she's not the only one betting on Milan.

Riccardo Giraudi, founder and CEO of Giraudi Group, is finally bringing his Beefbar restaurant to Milan, while Ferragamo's daughter Maria Sole's jewelry brand So-le Studio is opening its first retail unit inside Portrait Milano.

"Beefbar is an Italian 'brand' that never really set foot in the country," says Giraudi. "It's going to be a tailored experience, adapted to the identity of the place...when I first visited it, I told myself I just had to open a unit here."

The restaurant and cocktail bar, which nod to the '50s, will take over the landmark's east wing, building on the successful beef-leaning formula used in its 20 other locations globally, including in Paris, Tulum, Dubai, Mykonos and Hong Kong.

A bespoke menu mindful of the city's culinary tradition, peppered with an international flair, was conceived by executive chef Thierry Paludetto combining high and low, local and global. Think gyoza dumplings and Mexican quesadillas filled with Kobe beef, tuna and veal tartars,

and signature tenderloins with a side of mashed potatoes.

It's a homecoming for Maria Sole Ferragamo, too.

She lived abroad and returned to the city two years ago, finding it changed and energizing. "It evolved in my absence...no other place could welcome my first flagship," the creative says.

She conscripted Milan-based design firm Fondamenta, helmed by Francesca Beatrice Gagliardi and Federico Rossi, who translated the organic feel of Ferragamo's jewels into a unique store concept.

A modular wooden skeleton adjoining the space's walls is wrapped in fabric, cut out and sliced to reveal jewelry pieces. It was developed by Cometa's Contrada degli Artigiani carpentry, a socially conscious business supporting underprivileged children.

Marking the store's debut, Ferragamo is introducing a dedicated capsule collection which comprises new jewels and a bag – a new category for So-le Studio.

Opening in the spring, biobacking and antiage city clinic The Longevity Suite will complement Portrait's offering, mounting a spa in the basement. It is due to open in spring 2023 offering signature treatments combining detox, meditation and cryotherapy.



Portrait Milano's restaurant.